

We Can't be Friends

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Category: How to Train Your Dragon

Language: English

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2014-07-28 21:15:24

Updated: 2014-09-15 20:37:30

Packaged: 2016-04-26 20:13:46

Rating: T

Chapters: 6

Words: 17,473

Publisher: [www.fanfiction.net](http://www.fanfiction.net)

Summary: Dragons and Viking are still enemies, even in the year 2016. But things are a little different now. Dragons have developed a way to blend in with humans, making them a lot harder to find. Well, except when they're raiding your town that is. Dragon Hunting is one interesting after school hobby.

## 1. Prologue

The weather was terrible. Bitter cold, and with heavy clouds covering the moon, pitch dark. We could only hope that those clouds wouldn't open up on us. We couldn't afford to lose the Zipplebacks. Already, the attack had started, the first wave of Nadders and Grounkles blowing holes in their defenses. Once a path had been cleared, the second wave would come to start raiding for whatever they could find. Food, valuables, anything. Not because we wanted to. But because we had to. To disappoint our boss would mean certain death. Not that the Vikings knew that. Not that they cared. They'd be just fine with all of us getting killed, though they might want to do it themselves. For the glory. Ugh. With the second wave sent, a third would be waiting a ten minutes behind. The big players would be in this one. Largely comprised of Zipplebacks and a few Nightmares, they would be the ones to clear an exit for the rest and make sure to get as many out as they could. And me, I was to stay out of it unless things started going badly. I was not to steal. I was not to be seen. And most of all, I was not to miss. If I did that, I'd be welcomed into the nest. No more of this solo act crap.

I was crouched in a tree, not far away from the attack. It was much farther for a human but I could see everything. So far, we'd lost three Nadders and a Grounkles. More were going to fall soon. It was time for the second wave. From behind, I could hear them taking off, and soon enough, dragons were zooming past me on either side. Nadders, Grounkles, and Zipplebacks, all of them experienced. Not that experience mattered much sometimes. For every Viking we killed, it seems like they killed five of us. It was horrible, but that's the way life was. Kill or be killed. I couldn't help but wonder about that Nadder girl I'd met earlier.

I headed up higher in the tree, clawing my way to the top where I didn't have to watch through the branches. The wind pressed against my back, through my shirt, urging me to take flight. The others had already changed that morning, exchanging their human appearance for dragon skin. But this was the dead of night, the witching hour, this was when I could change freely. I would do what I needed when it was time, and not before. The second wave was having trouble. More were dying, we'd even lost a Zippleback. They weren't my family, not yet, but that didn't make it any easier to watch. The roars of dragons mixed with the screaming of the vikings. It wasn't a nice sound. With things turning south, the third wave was sent, the Nightmares were coming. One shot me a look as he flew past. It wasn't time yet. They just had to trust me on this. With the Nightmares in the fray, things were getting very interesting. They lit themselves on fire and easily made their way through the Vikings towards those who needed help, biting and blowing fire all the while. The Vikings, meanwhile, redirected their fire hoses towards the dragons whenever possible and managed to put a few dragons out of the fight. Mostly Grounkles since they weren't fast enough to get out of the way. Attacking the Nightmares with water while they were on fire was nearly pointless unless they hit the head. Where ever they managed to put out, the fire would only evaporate the water and they'd be burning once again. When the first Nightmare was taken down, I spread my wings and shot into the sky. I was as dark as any raven and as silent as an owl. They never expected it when I hit.

The first blow was to a weapons cart, unmanned but loaded with guns, crossbows, knives, and more. It exploding with a loud bang, sending hot metal shooting through the air. It only took me a second before I was far out of their rang but I could still hear them below me. What was that? I've never seen dragon fire like that! Where is it now? I don't see anything! With them distracted, the others began making their escape. Those who were hurt let the stronger dragons help them get away. At last, one of the Vikings whispered it. Nightfury. A wave of shock and disbelief passed through them. Nightfuries were rare. I knew that. Which was why I was brought on this raid. They needed an element of surprise. I wheeled through the air and dove, this time taking out one of their fire trucks. None of them even knew what to do and it wasn't long before the second was out of commission as well. Most who could get away already had, taking as much as they could carry with them. Not everyone managed to grab something so those who had the claws for it grabbed something extra. Losing a dragon to him was not something we could afford either. We needed every fighter we had. I took out one final building, I wasn't sure what it was, only that it was empty, before disappearing into the night.

I only had an hour left before my time was up. Then, whatever I was, I'd be stuck that way for the next day. I needed to hurry. Instead of falling in with the others, I headed high and rocketed along well over their head. Fortunately, our meeting place wasn't far and it only took me thirty minutes to get there, fifteen minutes sooner than everyone else. I twisted in the air, and dove fast. Past the thick pine trees, and down beside the rocky cliffs. At the last minute, I opened my wings and leveled out just above the sea water. The cave was around here somewhere. There. A few flaps and I was inside the cave. Bones shortened and the scales faded away, leaving me looking like a normal human. I went ahead and moved to where we had stashed the first aid supplies. I wasn't hurt, but that didn't mean I wasn't

going to help the others. A few other dragons had stayed behind here as humans. Mostly Nadders since they would be able to change if they needed to within a few hours. They were playing poker when I arrived. I ignored them for the time being and they ignored me. They knew the arrival time. And they also had three hundred bucks on the line. I wouldn't stop playing either. Here, we would start treating the wounded and count up what we'd gotten. That's what the Nadders were here for. They'd do what they could to those who needed it the most, and if there weren't enough to carry everything, they'd change as soon as they could to take whatever they needed to. We were on limited time though. Within an hour of their arrival, this cave would fill with water up to a Nadder's knees.

I started pulling down a heavy bag from the cave shelf where they put it. One of the Nadders came to help me. He must have folded. The man had bright blue hair that he kept spiked and thick scars on his arms to show for his experience.

"What are we looking at?" He asked, pulling down the second bag. Being older and therefore taller than me, he had an easier time with it than I did.

I didn't answer right away. We'd gotten away successfully, but not without plenty of losses as well. We would need more dragons to carry what we had too. Too many would be coming home with holes in them. "Be ready." The man whistled to the other three and we started getting things ready.

When the rest of the party arrived, they piled their loot in the back corner of the cave before landing. Hookfang, the commanding dragon on this raid, was off the dragon he'd been riding and giving orders before the third dragon even managed to drop off his things. Those who had been wounded were to gather around the acting medical team, the worse the injury, the closer to the front for treatment. Every other able bodied dragon was to begin sorting through the loot. I joined in with the medical team, along with Hookfang, since they were the ones who needed it the most. Just under half the dragons gathered around us and that wasn't even all of them. More, with minor injuries like bullet wounds and cuts, continued working despite being hurt. I saw the Nadder girl who had spoken to me earlier shoving through the pile with two ugly red holes in her back leg from a gun. It was too much work to be done. The dragons waiting towards the back of the group would have to wait until we returned home before they got treatment. I wasn't even sure how we were going to manage to get everything back. Hopefully someone had stolen some garbage bags so we could put what we could in those.

I had just finished wrapping a Grounkle's foot that had been chopped in two when I felt someone standing behind me. It was a patch job and still oozing blood but I'd done what I could. Hopefully they would be able to save it, assuming she hadn't lost too much blood and could make it home. It was Hookfang standing there when I turned around. His grey tank top was smeared with blood where he'd whipped his hands off and he looked like he was thirty instead of sixteen. Even the two braids hanging down from behind his ears looked frayed, and he usually kept those as neat as he could.

"So, kid, what do you think of your first raid?" He tried to keep things light, casual. I could respect him for that. But I didn't answer him. I just sighed and looked to the floor. I probably looked

like the oldest ten year old in the world. "Yeah... But, hey, you did great out there. We'd be glad to have ya. If you still want to join that is." He was watching me, waiting for my answer, waiting for what I'd do. I looked past him at the dragons around us. The hurt ones and those trying their best to help. To those who still worked even though they were hurt. Some of them would be giving up part of their share to help those who hadn't been able to get anything. And then there was the raid itself. Things hadn't gone well. Not really. So what would things have been like if I hadn't been there to distract the Vikings while everyone else got away. A lot more lives would have been lost. I hated that we had to do this, we all did, but I couldn't just leave them either. Maybe I was being too human but I wouldn't feel right doing it.

"Yes. I'll stay."

## 2. Viking Life

So you know those old stories about vikings and dragons? Yeah. They're true. There are still Vikings and there are still dragons and yes, we still hate each other even though it's been a few thousand years. That whole taking revenge and holding grudges to the grave isn't really working out. But we're not like we used to be. A huge man in a helmet and wielding a battle ax is a little too noticeable nowadays. Nevermind the hundred pound, fire-breathing, flying reptiles. No. We've grown since then, learned to blend in for the most part, unless you know what to look for. We Vikings are still huge and terrifying and carry too many weapons at any given time (which makes airport security pretty interesting), but we don't stick out like sore thumbs either. What we do is more of a side job, and the rest of the time we have run lives like every other run of the mill family. We could be you best friend, your neighbor, your boss, your dog's groomer; and you'll never know. But being humans, the hardest part about that is explaining to your other friends just how exactly you got a burn mark there. Dragons are an entirely different matter. Those fire-breathing beasts have gotten a lot better at hiding. They can make themselves look like humans now, just like you or me, which makes things a lot harder. They could be absolutely anywhere and you'd never know until it was too late. We've done our best to deal with them, made new traps, new weapons, even an early warning system, but there are still a lot more of them than us. And it certainly doesn't help that they've moved on from livestock and food. That's still what they're looking for, but now they'll take everything they can get their claws on. Money, furniture, technology. They'd even take that old coupon for Taco Hut if it's between them and the fridge. And they only ever seem to attack us. No pedestrians, no Mongols or Romans. Only us Vikings. Though that might be on us since we still like to live in cold, miserable places near the sea. It makes live pretty hard. But we keep surviving. We're too stubborn to die out now. Though, when you have school on top of dragon hunting, I almost wish we would. Thank god we only have two weeks left.

"Mr. Haddock, I realize school is almost over but would you like to turn your attention to the lesson?" I quickly set down my pencil, folding my arms over my drawings. Show casing dragon weapon doodles to the math teacher wasn't exactly a good idea. Especially with how twitchy the schools were. I could hear a few of the other kids snickering at my misfortune. In an advanced math class and laughing

when someone else gets in trouble. Real mature guys.

"Sorry, Mrs. Reiman." I said, glancing down at the floor instead of looking at her. The lady always reminded me of some kind of ugly dragon. All scaly and loud with freaky eyes that were always judging you. I wouldn't be surprised if she actually breathed fire on someone. She'd gotten close enough a few times. The old lady narrowed her eyes at me before huffing and walking back to the front of the classroom. I gave her a quick glance before turning my attention to someone else. The only person in my class that happened to be both a Viking like myself and a freshman in a junior class. Astrid. Most Vikings had nicknames that we used around each other. Just to identify each other easier. Finding a Barflout is a lot easier than finding a John or Emily. But Astrid, Astrid doesn't have one. She's too awesome for that. Beautiful too. Blond hair and amazing blue eyes. And of course she barely pays attention to me. The only time she so much as looks in my direction is when I've screwed up. Again. In school though, she does her best to deny my very existence. A lot of the other Vikings in the school do. And a lot of the other students as well. My reputation precedes me. What can I say?

Mrs. Reiman was babbling on about some kind of equation we were supposed to learn next year. It looked a little tricky but nothing I couldn't work out myself. Back to counting down the minutes until I got out of here.

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Of course, once school is out, that means I have to deal with the others. The normal students all live on the south side of town, us Vikings on the north side. They don't come to our side, we don't go to theirs. It's safer that way and even they know that, though they don't know what they're safe from. It's better that way. So that means a wonderful forty minute bus ride with the only other Vikings my age, who all either hate me or use me for their own personal amusement.

"Hey Haddork!" Ugh. Snotlout. The other boy came up jogging beside me on our way to the bus. It had actually gotten here a few minutes early for once. Fishlegs was probably going to miss it. "I heard you broke stuff in chemistry. Looks like you're going to have to pay for it. Again. How do you pay for all this? Do you just have a special fund for when you mess up?"

"Thank you for that great question, Harald. Did you manage to fail another math test today?" It was fun to watch his face when I called him by his real name. He absolutely hated it.

"Don't call me that. And no, I didn't. We didn't even have a math test today."

"Uh, yeah. We did." And that would be Ruffnut. She was one of the twins and also one of the only girls. She was trailing behind us with her brother, Tuffnut.

"What? I thought you said it was tomorrow! I just got a D in there!" Snotlout turned on the two.

"Yeah. We did." Ruffnut just watched him with a smug grin.

"But we lied." And Tuffnut got a punch to the face almost as soon as he finished. Snotlout was on him fast enough. Ruffnut did nothing, like usual, just watched and laughed. I took the chance to get on the bus while they fought. Those three fought all the time. It was almost better when they did fight among themselves. It kept them from completely destroying the town. I took my usual spot at the front of the bus, right behind the driver. The Troublesome Trio liked to hang out at the back of the bus so they could make faces at people from the back window. Fishlegs sat a few rows behind me. He did a lot of his homework on the bus and sometimes we would help each other out on homework but that was about as far as that went. And Astrid, Astrid sat in about the middle of the bus. I didn't even try to invite her to sit with me anymore. I usually just sat there and worked on whatever or read a book. There wasn't much to do with just six of us on there. That didn't mean it was quiet though. Until the twins got off at the third stop, it sounded like a hoard of seventh graders were throwing a party in the back. Fishlegs was the first one to get off. He lived on the edge of our side of town, right next to the river that split the town in two. After that was Astrid, then the twins. It took another ten minutes until Snotlout got off at his house. Of course, being my cousin and all, he only lived a stop away from my house. Ah. The joys of family.

Speaking of, it's always reassuring to find your monstrously huge dad looming over you when you get home. Stoick the Vast. He was good enough to have two names. Which would only make sense since he was the 'chief' of the Vikings here. No pressure to fill those boots.

"Hey Dad. Something going on?" I asked, putting my backpack on a hook by the door. He wasn't usually home when I got there, too busy and all, which could only mean one thing.

"There's going to be a raid tonight." Yes! "We just found out an hour ago. They're going to come by sunset. I want you inside when they get here." He was practically staring me down with eyes that poked out under huge red caterpillars. He was serious this time. But then again, when wasn't he serious? His name was Stoick for a reason.

"I've figured out what was wrong last time. I can fix it. Here, let me show you." I started to unzip my backpack to get my sketchbook. I knew I could do it. If he would just give me another chance. I just needed to prove it to him. Instead, he interrupted me before I could even get it all the way open.

"No, son. I want you inside. We have this same conversation every time. You stay inside with Gobber and we'll deal with the dragons when they come. I don't want to see you out there tonight. Got it?" He was using 'that' voice. It must be a big one if he met me at home and used 'that' voice. Tonight was a perfect night to test it out again. Bigger raids meant it was more likely that it would show up. If I could get that dragon, I would be golden forever. At the very least I might be able to kill a Nightmare to make up for everything. But my dad was stubborn. I'd have to wait until tonight when everyone was busy. Just like what I did usually. But for now...

I gave a sigh. "Got it." I stared at the ground and pulled the zipper hard to close it. Dad gave me a long look before he said anything again. He probably knew what I had up my sleeve but with a large

dragon raid on it's way, he had more important things to deal with.

"Good. Now go get something to eat and head over to the shop. I have to go but I'll stop by later to check in. So you'd better be there."

"Of course." I ducked around him and headed to the kitchen to grab an apple. Behind me I could hear him leaving the house, leaving me alone.

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Gobber the Belch was one of the other great and important Vikings in our group. He was also my dad's best friend and my babysitter. Officially, I was his 'apprentice' but we all knew what he really was. He's a grouchy, sarcastic old man with a huge mustache and a missing a few pieces here and there. He ran the hunting store on our side of town, if you could call it that. It actually sold just about everything. We had everything from top grade guns and crossbows to silverware to prosthetic limbs. Basically, we sold everything you couldn't find at Walmart or the farm store. And I always got the fun jobs like inventory or cleaning up the spray paint isle. I found Gobber sitting towards the back of the store fixing some broken crossbows when I got there. I took my own place near him with a crossbow of my own. Someone dry-fired it and snapped a limb in half.

"So, how was school?" He asked without looking up from his work.

"Boring. Like always." I unscrewed the limbs from the rest of crossbow. "I heard there's going to be a raid tonight."

"Aye. There is. And you know where you're going to be?" He didn't bother to let me answer. "Here. Manning the shop."

"Are you sure you want to do that? Caging up all this," I gestured at myself, "warrior... ness?"

He gave me a flat look. "Yes."

"Alright, fine. But I could help! I have that crossbow I've been working on that-"

"Oh you mean that pile of junk in the back? Need I remind you that the last time you tried firing that thing, you left a dent in my car so big that it looked like you dropped a dragon on it?"

"That was a miscalibration. I fixed it"

"Just like you fixed the last one?"

"That was an accident and the cow was fine."

"What about that other one?"

"Hey, that one worked."

"It burned Silent Stan's house down. His eyebrows still haven't grown

back."

I didn't have an answer for that one. I just glanced down at the ground and turned back to what I was doing. He won this round. We managed to go through a few more bows before he spoke up again.

"When you're done with that one, head back to the back and get started making bolts. We're going to need plenty once these are done."

I spend the next two hours putting together more crossbow bolts than I could count. I'd been doing it for a while and managed to get pretty good at it. The loud boom of a fire ball interrupted my work though. I grabbed as many of the bolts as I could carry and headed back to the front. Already, Vikings were pouring inside to get weapons. It was like handing out candy on Halloween. I dropped the bolts into a large empty bucket by the desk before heading to prop the door open. The shop was closer to the center of town but I could still make out the first wave of dragons moving their way in. A mess of Deadly Nadders and Grounkles were tearing up as much as they could. Nadders and Grounkles both were nasty beast. A Nadder could shoot poisonous spikes from their tails and breath fire hot enough to melt boulders. Grounkles, meanwhile, could spew lava and were heavy enough to crush a car. Both of them were considered lightweights as far as dragons we dealt with went. Nadders were quick but lacked fire power and were easily distracted. Grounkles, meanwhile, were slow and easy to hit. If I managed to get a Nadder tonight, that would get me noticed. And a Grounkle would definately get me places with the girls. If, of course, I managed to get out there in time.

"Hurry up with the bolts! We've got supply and demand here!" Gobber shouted at me as I ran back to the back. They'd already managed to clear out what bolts I had brought. It seemed like every time I brought more bolts, we were out already. By the time I managed to bring the last batch, the second wave had hit and things were starting to get pretty bad out there. Others had made off with most of the guns and crossbows, only Gobber's private stash was left. I found him loading up the wagon. That meant he'd be leaving soon himself. A Nadder spine had made it's way through the grating around the windows and embedded itself in the glass. Beyond that, the sun had almost completely gone down and the street lights were one. A Grounkle came slamming into the street in front of the shop with three bolts sticking out of it's side. I did my best to ignore it and help out Gobber.

"Go get me three rounds of .45s." He ordered. I got them and came back as fast as I could before he sent me to go get more stuff. The final piece was a heavy battle ax that he got himself. Those kinds of weapons weren't used as much as they used to be but we did still use them. Gobber's had been in his family for generations now and, as he liked to put it, 'axes were made to be used'. He took it out almost every time we had a raid and it usually came back bloody. Zippleback gas smoked around some buildings a few streets away before exploding in loud booms. Zipplebacks were sneaky, with two heads instead of one. Two heads, twice the rewards. With the Zipplebacks here, that meant the Monstrous Nightmares were around too. Those were some of the toughest dragons we faced and liked to light themselves on fire. Only the best went after them. None of them were what I was looking for. The dragon I wanted was much more dangerous than any Nightmare.



And before the night was over, it'd come. It always did.

"Hiccup." Gobber was pulling the cart towards the door. I headed him off, punching the panel that would open the automatic door and holding the other open myself. "Things are getting messy. I'll be back. And for Pete's sake, do what your father asks for once and stay here." He said before wheeling off down the street, undoubtedly to deal with that Zippleback. I gave him a nod before ducking back inside. I waited until the automatic door closed itself before running out the back with my own weapon.

Outside was chaos. Just a few streets away, a line of Vikings were hiding behind a car, opening fire on a set of Nightmares attacking the grocery store. Nadders were coming from the other side, shotting their spikes at the Vikings, dividing the attack between the two groups of reptiles. I just barely missed getting kabobbed darting out from an alleyway. Fortunately the other Vikings were too preoccupied to yell at me before I pulled away from the fighting. That was close. I was using a different path to my spot when I heard it, when we all heard it. A high pitched ballistic noise followed by a large explosion. The Night Fury had arrived. No one has ever seen a Night Fury. It's so terrifying that it's considered the unholy offspring of lightning and death itself. And I was going to kill it.

I passed maybe a dozen fights on my way out to the cliffs. Luckily, I didn't come across my father. Both dragons and Vikings were dropping, more dragons than Vikings. When I reached the edge of the cliffs, the place was bare and empty. With the sky black, the Night Fury was invisible. I would have to rely on sound to find him. I hefted my huge contraption to my shoulder and waited. The thing resembled a bazooka but instead of firing torpedoes, it would shoot a special bullet that separated and spread a net over whatever I was aiming at. For several minutes, everything was quiet. The sounds of fighting was back behind me but that wasn't what I was listening for. Everything else seemed to fade out. There was nothing but me, that Night Fury, and the silence he was hiding in. At last, it came again, that ballistic sound. It was coming from the left. In three... two... one! I pulled the trigger and hoped that my net would hit. For a moment, there was nothing. Then, a loud roar. It was like nothing I'd heard before. Much higher pitch than a Grounkle's roar but lower than a roar from a Nadder. It was the roar of a Night Fury. I got him. I could just barely see his form as he fell towards the old part of town. It was abandoned and overgrown. Hopefully I could get there before he got away. I might have even made it there that night, if not for the Zippleback.

The dragon came out of nowhere. The only warning I had was a few thin trails of green gas creeping up behind me as I headed through the mostly deserted part of town. When I looked back, I didn't even see the thing, just a wall of green fog headed straight towards me. I broke out into a run and hid in a nearby alleyway just in time for the massive explosion that always marked a Zippleback ignition. I was an untrained fishbone. There was no way I could take on a Zippleback and win. And I had left my weapon by the cliffs. I was dead. I glanced around, trying to find a way out. There! A fire escape just a few feet away with the ladder down and everything. I ran straight at the thing, taking a clumsy jump onto the ladder. I made it to the first landing when one of the Zippleback's heads snaked around the corner. I froze and watched it. Hopefully, it wouldn't see me and would just leave. The massive blue head inched forward, it's yellow

eyes scanning for anything alive and moving. Just when I thought it was going to give up, the head jerked up and stared straight at me. It let out a low hiss, green gas pouring out of it's mouth. I wasn't waiting around for the second head to arrive and turn me into a fried fishbone. I pulled myself up the ladder as fast as I could. The dragon wasn't far behind, scrambling up the sides of the buildings around us in favor of flying. I made it to the roof just a few minutes before the dragon did. There wasn't really much of a plan beyond don't die, so I booked it across that roof as fast as I could. Fortunately, it was an industrial building rather than a residential one and had a nice flat roof. The dragon chased after me, each head biting and snapping. When we reached the edge of the roof, I did the stupidest thing possible and jumped. The gap between the two buildings was at least four feet across. I was lucky that I managed to make it to the other side, though, I did get few nice scraps from landing poorly. The Zippleback didn't have the same trouble. After about the third building, we finally started to come across others. Battles started popping up below us, battles that the Vikings were winning. They had managed to net several Nadders and Grounkles, and were working on forcing the Zipplebacks and Nightmares to retreat. It was nice to know that things were going well for them. Behind me, there was another loud bang and the edges of my pants started to sizzle. This wasn't going well. And running out of buildings wasn't helping much.

I skidded to a stop, banging into the concrete wall and nearly toppling over the side. A street separated me from the next building and I didn't see a fire escape on this side. I turned around to the site of two massive heads staring down at me, one sparking angrily and thin trails of green gas leaking from the mouth of the other. I was going to die a horrible death by Zippleback. The head on the left let loose a cloud of gas and I did my best not to breath in. Zippleback gas was toxic and could make a person nauseous with just the littlest bit. I tried to lean back to get away from them, but with absolutely nothing behind me, I stopped that pretty quick. I still hadn't decided which was a better way to go, getting blown up or falling to my death. The right opened it's mouth- only to get interrupted by a large tire ramming into the side of it's head. All three of us looked to the ground to see who had done it. And you know, I'd take falling to my death or being blown up over what was really going to end me. My father. When the Zippleback broke left to take on the new challenger, I ran to the right, praying for a fire escape or something. Anything that could get me off this roof.

As it happened, it didn't have a fire escape but it did have a door on the roof that led inside. Which would have been great if it wasn't locked. While I searched for something that I could pick the lock with, I could hear the fight between my father and the Zippleback below me. So far, my dad was winning. Not that that was very surprising. He was the best dragon killer in the Hooligan clan. The man fought Nightmares with his bare hands for Pete's sake. By the time I had gotten the door open and made my way down all four flights of stairs, my dad had just about finished off the Zippleback. I let him continue what he was doing and sped around the corner. Right into another Viking who was helping hold down a net full of Nadders. I rammed into him hard enough to send him stumbling, which made him loose hold of the net, which made it possible for half a dozen Nadders to escape. Along with all our food. I, meanwhile, bounced back into the back end of a partially full weapons cart. The brake wasn't working well, a surprisingly common problem in a clan that had

to deal with me, and the whole thing went rolling down the hill, guns and all. A few blocks down, a Monstrous Nightmare successfully managed to light it on fire, which is not a good thing considering it had gun powder and a few other flammable substances on it. It lit three houses on fire before it fell to pieces. I winced at every curb it managed to cross. With those Nadders loose, the dragons apparently decided that they had enough of our stuff and began their retreat. I knew when Dad came up behind me but didn't want to look at him. Or the group of people who had come to watch the father son scene that was about to unfold. Wow, the burn marks on the side walk sure were interesting!

"Hiccup." He sighed. Which was worse. I did my best to brace myself.

"Ok, I know what you're going to say but I hit a Night Fury so we should probably get out there. It was headed towards the old warehouses."

He didn't even dignify that with an answer, just rolled his eyes before going back to glaring at me. "Did I, or did I not tell you to stay inside?"

"You did." Yeah. I was dead. But hey, what else was new? It's not like I didn't do this on a regular basis. I tried not to make eye contact with him, only glancing up from the ground every now and then.

"Why do you always do this? You know how this always ends! Everywhere you go, you make messes! I have more important things to take care of than cleaning up after you! Rebuilding houses for example." He waved a hand at the flaming buildings, which were now surrounded by firetrucks. "Do you have any idea how much time and money that takes? Never mind how much it costs to replace everything they take. Would it kill you to do as I say just once?"

"Sorry, Dad. I see the fighting and the dragons and I just have to join in. I can hold back my dragon slaying instincts."

He gave me an exasperated look. He was done with me tonight. "You might have instincts, but they are certainly not for dragon slaying." His gaze shifted to behind me. "Gobber. Take him home." The other man gave me a shove from behind. My father, meanwhile, headed towards the firetrucks, mumbling all the way. I saw Snotlout and the twins on the side snickering at my screw up. Astrid stood a little ways away from them, looking like she expected this to happen the whole time. Fortunately, Gobber led me away from them so I didn't have to listen to their sneering.

### 3. Night Fury Down

"I really did shoot down a Night Fury though!" We were about a block away from my house now and Gobber had been listening to me ramble for about five minutes now. "I just wish he would listen to me."

"Uh huh."

"And when he does listen, he always looks so disappointed in me. Like it's my fault I came out like this." I gestured at myself. "A talking

fishbone."

"He doesn't have a problem with how you look. It's the inside that he doesn't like." I think he was trying to make me feel better but he just ended up making things worse. I just frowned at him and opened the door to my house.

"Thank you for clearing that up, Gobber."

"Look, all I'm saying is that if the square doesn't fit in the round hole, don't try to force it."

"Well maybe it wants to fit." I didn't give him time to answer. I just shut the door and left him on the porch. And of course I immediately headed for the back door. I had to find that Night Fury. Once I did, everything would get better.

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I started from the edge of the old warehouse district and worked my way in. That was the surest way to find it, even if it did take me a while. It seemed like a good idea at the time, but five hours later and aching feet, I was starting to regret it. It was a good thing that it was a weekend. And with everything that had happened last night, my father would probably be busy all night and not return until late morning. That meant that he would probably just think I had gone out for the day. I sat down on the empty streets to take a break. The sun was starting to come up now and I still hadn't found it. I knew that Night Fury was around here. It had to be. I know I hit it. I flipped open the map of the city I had brought with me and marked off the block I had just checked. The warehouse district was right at the edge of town, not far from the forest, which was why we had to abandon it. It was too easy a target for the dragons and cost more than it was worth to keep it up and running. That left plenty of big empty buildings to explore and hide in. Which meant that I had to check every building to make sure that I didn't miss anything. I let out a sigh and looked up at the buildings around me. At this rate, I was never going to find it.

The roof of a building across the street had a hole in the short wall around the edge. Almost as though something had crashed into it... I jumped to my feet and ran across the street. That had to be it. There might have been a lot of dragon attacks here in the past but that damage was too new. And no one came here. Well, maybe some silly kids but that was it. And they certainly weren't able to take off part of a roof. I made sure to stop just before I passed in front of a small alley branching off from the main street. If I was right, then I would find the Night Fury at the end of that alley. I stared at the pile of rubble in the street for a few moments. Oh yeah, that was definitely new. And honestly, I was freaking out some. Calm down, Hiccup. Calm down. I wasn't even sure if it was still there or if it had gotten away. I slowly peered around the corner of the building and spotted a small black form halfway down the street. I pressed myself to the wall before I got a good look.

"I hit it... I hit it! Haha!" I shouted before clamping my mouth shut. I was too excited but I actually hit it! Things were going to be so much better now! Once I killed it that was. I was about to kill my first dragon... Wow.

>I looked around the corner again. Admittedly, it was a lot smaller

than I expected. I could have sworn that the thing I saw last night was bigger. But then again, no one had ever seen a Night Fury before so who was I to say. I stared at it long and hard to see if it was still moving. When it didn't, I went ahead and started towards the beast, knife at the ready. It was a lot more nerve wracking that I thought it would be. I spared a few glances around before I got there. It looked as though it had crashed into the building's fire escape on it's way. It did a number to it too, the second story landing as smashed inward and the thing as a whole was having trouble staying attached to the side of the building. I wouldn't be surprised if it fell off in the next storm.<p>

As I got closer, I noticed some things. For one, it wasn't a dragon. It was a boy. Which made things infinitely more difficult. I focused in on his face first, watching to see if his eyes were open. He looked about my age. With tan skin and slicked back black hair. It was hard to think of it that way. That the fire breathing beast that had been terrifying us for the last five years was just a kid. The rest of him wasn't much better. He wasn't big or terrifying. I mean, he was small and thin and wore all black, right down to the black skater shoes. He was without a doubt the Night Fury though. He was so tangled in my net that his arms were pinned to his side and across his chest and his legs were trapped in an uncomfortable position. He probably got that way when he crashed into the fire escape. Maybe even afterwards, if he tried struggling against it. I wished he hadn't changed back into a human. Maybe he thought it would make me have mercy. Or maybe he just wasn't thinking straight but I wish he were still a dragon. That would have made things so much easier. My moment of triumph was turning into terror. I wasn't sure if I could kill the dragon anymore. Not like this.

When I looked at his face again, his eyes were open, and they were staring right at me. Scales had started sprouting around his hair line and along his cheeks and even his bone structure had changed some, turning just slightly sharper and farther forward. And his eyes weren't human. They were too big and there was too much iris. Too much green. And slitted pupils like a snakes'. It should have made things easier. It made him less human, more like the beast I heard about. It didn't though. He didn't shout. He didn't beg. He didn't say a word. He didn't show any expression at all. He just stared. Not glare, just stared. And I just stared back. Because the longer I looked, the more I could see that he was terrified. I had to do it though. It would fix everything, right?

"I'm going to kill you. I'm gonna do it." I shifted the knife into position. "I'm going to cut out your heart. I'm a Viking. I am a Viking, you hear me!" I raised the blade over my head. Why did he have to watch me? Why did he have to look human? Obviously god hated me. I caught myself looking at him and turned away. I needed to focus. I had to have my target or else I might do it wrong. And after all, it wasn't like this was a human being anyways. I gave him another quick look. The dragon part of him had crept in more, making his mouth just a little bit to wide, his skin rougher. He wasn't human. He was a dragon, a- a fire-breathing monster that was responsible for the deaths of countless Vikings. I was a Viking! Those were my people he killed! I had to do this! He deserved this! He closed his eyes and relaxed, like he had just accepted that he was going to die. Every bit of determination I had somehow managed to muster disappeared. I couldn't do it.

I let the knife drop to my side and stared at him again. At his pinned limbs. I could see bruises starting to form along one side of his face too. And I did that. I hurt him. He still didn't look human, not completely, but he looked pitiful and defeated and trapped. It wasn't right. I started to cut through the rope that he managed to tangle himself in. He immediately tensed, knowing what was going on. I ignored it and kept cutting. If he wanted to kill me after this, fine. But I wasn't going to kill him. And I wasn't going to leave him trapped here either. It took a while before the net really started to loosen up. I wasn't giving myself time to think about it. I just kept cutting and cutting. Right up until he spun out of the ropes and tackled me to the ground. His face was close enough to mine that all I could see was his eyes and feel his breath. I couldn't get a read on him. I had no idea what he was going to do or what he was thinking. Or why he hadn't completely turned into a dragon and blown me off the face of the earth. I just knew I was terrified and every bit of it was showing on my face. His forearm pressed against my throat certainly wasn't helping either.

We stayed like that for what seemed like forever before he finally did something. The pressure on my neck increased and I was sure he was going to kill me. Instead, he jumped back a second later and tried to run. He made it two steps before his leg buckled under him and he went down. I didn't have to guess why. I could hear the crunch. Even when his leg broke, he didn't make a sound. He just crouched on the ground, obviously trying to keep it together. He tried again after just a moment or two but his left leg wouldn't bend. It was stuck and trying to make it move only made things worse since he went down again, this time letting out a very quiet hiss of pain. It was more than just a broken leg he was dealing with. And I'm the one who did it.

I was possibly the dumbest, craziest Viking because instead of running away while I had the chance, I got up and helped him into the nearest building. Thankfully for me, he was in too much pain to realize what was going on before passing out halfway there. So much for fixing everything.

#### 4. One Nightmare to Another

"Soooo?" She asked.

"So what?"

"So how are you settling in? Do you like it here?" Stormfly pried. As though she hadn't asked me that everyday since I got here. She'd appointed herself as my keeper, making sure I got what I needed and telling me who I should avoid. It was better than figuring out everything on my own but good god, I wasn't an idiot. I could take care of myself. It wasn't as though I'd had a nanny for the last ten years. I guess what I was thinking was written on my face because she made a face. She backed off though.

"Fine." She huffed. "But you just remember, I'm getting that microwave for you." I just rolled my eyes. She smacked me for that. We fell into a comfortable silence as we walked between the buildings. I had been here a week and supposedly we were heading to a restaurant to meet up with her friends. Which was on the other side of the Nest. It would good to meet some new people at least. Everyone

I tried to talk to myself just gave me strange looks or tried to establish dominance. They were almost as bad as wild dragons. Guess that's what happens when you're the new scent in the group. Hopefully that would go away soon.

Stormfly tugged on my sleeve. "There it is!" She pointed to a building at the end of the street. The place looked sketchy at best, with a ragged onning and a battered sign in the front that read 'Red Dragon Buffet'. They either stole that sign or had an interesting sense of humor. It was the kind of place most people would have avoided but Stormfly swore by it when she dragged me out. I had to hold back the frown. Apparently I was 'easy to read' as she liked to put it. I didn't want her to know that I'd rather go home and eat more instant ramen than go in there. When she started running down the street, I ran after her, keeping up pretty easily despite the fact that I was two years younger and shorter than her.

Fortunately, the inside looked much better than the outside. The owners, who were Nightmares as far as I could tell, had painted the inside bright red and gold. Red paper lanterns hung from the ceiling. Booths lined one side of the room, hibachi grills on the other, and black lacker tables between them. A Nightmare chef was performing at one of the hibachi tables, setting himself on fire while he cooked for the Zippleback kids watching. Stormfly sped right past the Grounkle hostess and zipped to the back of the restaurant where a group of three were already seated. The Zippleback pair was in a headed debate about what to eat when Stormfly interrupted them.

"Why do you two have to do this every time we go out?" She said, sliding into the seat across from them. That left me with either the seat beside one of the Zippleback boys or between Stormfly and the Grounkle girl. I chose the one beside Stormfly.

"Because he has horrible taste, that's why!" The one next to the empty seat answer, jabbing a finger at his double.

"Oh, sure, I'm the one with horrible taste. At least I don't spend an hour picking broccoli out of my teeth after every meal!" He shot back, getting into the other's face.

"I don't eat broccoli at every meal! Don't you pay attention to anything?" They were nose to nose now.

"Not when it has to do with you!" This was getting awkward. Stormfly rolled her eyes at them and turned her attention back to me.

"The Bicker Buddies are Belch and Barf." When she said their names, they both looked up as if the teacher had called on them. "And that," She pointed to the girl on the other side of me, "is Meatlug." The girl gave me a warm smile. "And if Hookfang would ever get here, the group would be complete."

Meatlug looked more than a little annoyed about Hookfang and his timeliness. "That boy is never here on time." I got the feeling that she wasn't the kind of person to get annoyed easily. He must have been really bad.

"What are you talking about?" Belch, I think, took a moment from his argument to join in our conversation. "He's never late."

"He's always right on time and we're all early." Barf continued with a sarcastic smile. I was still uncomfortable. It was weird being in the middle of a group that obviously close. I wasn't really sure what to do. Fortunately, Meatlug helped me out.

"Toothless right?" She asked. I didn't actually say anything, I just nodded at her. She didn't seem to mind my silence. "How are you liking things so far? Is this your first time being a part of a Nest?"

"Um, yeah. It's really different. I like it pretty well so far. It's nice not being on your own." That seemed to satisfy her. Belch had leaned over to listen in, actually breaking contact with his brother while Barf and Stormfly talked about something.

"So what are you? I've never smelled something like you before?" He asked. Meatlug gave him a hard look.

"Belch! That's rude!" She scolded.

"It's fine. I don't mind. I'm a-"

"No no no! Don't tell me! Lemme guess." He interrupted. I shrugged and leaned back in my chair. He leaned farther forward, squinting his green eyes as he studied me. "You're a..." He gave the air a sniff. "Strike class?" I nodded. He was right. The Zippleback fell silent. This was the tricky part. Not many knew what a Night Fury smelled like, much less looked like as a human. He was leaning so far forward I thought he was about to fall into the table. "Frightmare?" I shook my head. Not even close.

"Of course not stupid." That was Barf. "Have you ever seen a Frightmare that wears all black? Besides, the smell isn't right."

"A Skrill then." Belch tried again. And again I shook my head. I saw Stormfly smirking out of the corner of my eye. Meatlug and the twins were thoroughly confused. The two Zipplebacks turned to each other and whispered between themselves. And while Meatlug wasn't playing, I could tell she was trying to figure it out as well. Eventually, Barf leaned across the table and tried to get Stormfly to tell him but she wouldn't budge. At last, Belch gave up. "Alright." He sighed. "What are you?"

"Night Fury."

The three went quiet and stared at me for a moment or two. I noticed a Nadder a few tables away give me a glance as well. Barf and Belch traded looks with each other and then with Meatlug.

"But I-"

"I see you all are incredibly early." Hookfang broke in, sliding into the empty chair. Meatlug gave him a flat look but didn't say anything. Hookfang just leaned across the table with his arm stretched out to give me a fist bump. I returned the gesture. "So kid, how are things going for you? Getting everything straightened out?" He asked, leaning back in his seat. I just nodded. "Good. If anyone gives you crap, you send 'em my way." I glared at him for that. If anyone tried to 'give me crap' I would deal with it myself. I didn't need anyone trying to fight my fights. I was more than



capable of taking care of myself. The Nightmare ignored me, Belch taking up his attention instead.

"Pfft. Like you're some kind of hot shot." He snorted. Barf was bobbing his head behind him.

"Hey. I lead raids." He shot back. "I'm going places, unlike you two pyromaniacs."

"You led one." Barf this time. The three fell into a rather loud argument. Stormfly noticed my aggravation at least and gave me a pat on the shoulder.

"He says that to every newbie. Don't take it the wrong way. It's just his way of making friends." She glanced up at the squabbling dragons. "Tries to at least." I just grunted and started looking over the menu. The restaurant had a sushi section. A pretty decent one too. "If someone does bother you, go ahead and send them to Hookfang. You can watch him get his ass handed to him!" She sounded so chipper about it I couldn't help but smile. The Nightmare looked up at the sound of his name but before he could say anything, our waiter, a Grounkle, came to get our orders. Hookfang started off with a General Tso's chicken, making sure it was as hot as they offered. The twins tried to order at the same time, which didn't work very well seeing as they both wanted different things. The waiter watched them yell different dish names at each other before turning to Stormfly. Apparently they weren't having teriyaki shrimp or broccoli beef. They were having shrimp stirfry. I got the feeling that that happened a lot.

While they bickered, Meatlug leaned over to me. "Have you ever been to a Nest restaurant before?" She asked. I shook my head. "Well, just be warned, the serving sizes are a lot bigger here." I got a serious big sister vibe coming off her. I just nodded and ordered an Alaskan roll. Meatlug finished off with a pile of rocks and the waiter ran off to do his job. With him gone, the twins went back to bickering with each other, or rather, continued to bicker with each other since they never stopped in the first place. Hookfang and Stormfly talked across the table, and Meatlug seemed content to ask me questions. It was strange to sit around and just talk with other dragons. It was normal to them, but years in the wild left me nervous and jumpy. I kept expecting for a fight to break out or someone to grow claws and try to drive me out or something. It was just, bizarre. And Meatlug was weirdly sincere about everything she said. It was a little creepy. But, seeing as the last time I met a Grounkle we were fighting over a bit of territory, maybe that was just me. But as the night wore on, I started relaxing, having fun, making jokes. Especially when the food came out. Stormfly's chow mien was tall enough to eat a dog and Meatlug's rocks nearly flipped the table. Barf and Stormfly both had to hold down that end of the table while they tried to eat. It was actually a really nice night.

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We trudged through the cold in silence. The raid hadn't gone well. We lost three Zipplebacks, two Nightmares, and more Grounkles and Nadders than any of us wanted to think about. It was practically a massacre. Stormfly came back with a gash on her leg, Meatlug had bolts in her shoulder, and Barf and Belch both had bullets lodged in their backs. And they both wore the biggest, stupid grins on their

stupid faces. I wanted to punch them off. The two were in front of us, chattering like excited school girls with Stormfly and I following. It was the middle of the next day and we were heading back from the comic store. Meatlug had been with us too but she got caught up reading She-Hulk so we went on without her. Hookfang was still trying to sort out everything that had happened. We didn't know when he'd be able to get away. I'd been glaring at them the entire way, which they ignored, surprise surprise. Stormfly nudged me in the arm.

"Would you calm down? It's over. Let it go."

"Dragons died." I growled.

"Yeah. Some always do. It just the way things go. You know that."

"Well maybe more would have come home if not for those two idiots." Barf and Belch came to a complete stop. Calling them stupid was the number one way to get them mad. And I knew that.

"Excuse me?" They said at the same time, looking over their shoulder at me. It was nice to know that they could pay attention when they wanted to. Now if they would only do it when they were supposed to. I didn't answer them, just glared. I wasn't backing down from this and I made that very clear. They turned to face me, returning the aggression. "Who are you calling idiots?" Stormfly took a step away.

"The two that ruined the entire fucking raid in one fell swoop." The two rushed me, banging me against the wall of the alley we were in.

"We aren't stupid." Belch hissed.

"And we didn't ruin the raid. We saved dragons, moron." Barf spat the word at me.

"From something you started in the first place! Dragons died because of your stupid fuck up!" They might have had me pinned but if anything, that made me even more dangerous.

"We did what we were told, you shit."

"And you managed to fuck that up too!" I was getting in their face now, forcing them back a step or two. "I mean, is this a fucking game to you? Dragons we knew died. Does that matter to you or do you just go on those raids to get your shits and giggles blowing up stuff?"

"Who the hell do you think you are? Asking shit like that"

"Those were our friends, our nest-mates. We've known them a lot longer than you've even been here."

"They were our family, something you'll never know, you're practically extinct after all! You don't get to talk to us about-"

They never got to finish the sentence, my fist was too busy ramming

into Barf's face. Before Belch could get a hit on me, I kicked him in the ribs. I felt Barf's elbow slam down between my neck and shoulder. The skinny bastards were slow but they were at least a foot taller than me and packed one hell of a punch. I barely hesitated a second before turning on him, managing to punch him twice in the gut and once in his face before Belch tackled me from behind. We went down roaring, grabbing each other and rolling on the ground. Belch ended up on top and managed to break my nose. But more often than not, I dodged his blows and his fist met with hard asphalt. I reached up and clawed at his face and hair, grabbing a handful of the shaggy red stuff and forcing his head to meet mine. That stopped him long enough for me to roll him off, only to have Barf take his place. He was a much better shot than his brother and got two hits on my jaw. My blood was pumping and I was ready to tear off both their heads. I roared in his face and grabbed his shoulders to roll. Instead, he was ripped off me by a third party. I scrambled to my feet, wired and ready to keep going. It was Meatlug who stood between us, giving each of us hard, disappointed looks.

"Stop it! All of you!" She growled. "I'll be damned if I let my friends kill each other! Now put your claws away!" When Meatlug started using fowl language, that meant she was serious. I looked between her and the Zippleback. Barf and Belch were holding hands. If they wanted to, they could change right here and now and take me out if they wanted. Instead, they just glared at me, their eyes yellow and green scales starting to creep down their faces. I became aware of my own scales sprouting. I'm sure that my own eyes were green and dilated like theirs. I let out a growl and they met it with hisses of their own, Belch only a moment behind his brother. "I. Said. Stop it!" Meatlug roared. Stormfly was off to the side, watching and bobbing like a bird. Belch and Barf slowly relaxed out of their stances, their scales disappearing into normal human skin. I followed their lead. When the three of us were relaxed and looking human, Meatlug relaxed as well. She stayed between us though. She let a sigh out her nose and smoothed her bangs. "Good. Now Barf, Belch, I think you should go home. Stormfly, Toothless, and I will go back to my house." Her house was in the exact opposite direction. I could tell that the twins hated taking orders from her, but they didn't argue. They gave me one last glare before heading down the alley way. Once they cleared the tight area, they changed into their full dragon form and took off. They weren't headed home but they were going somewhere else. That's all that really mattered right now.

With them gone, I relaxed the rest of the way and shoved my hands back in my pockets. Stormfly walked over to join us. None of us said anything. Meatlug gave me a hard look and stormed down the alley in the opposite direction. As if it was my fault. Stormfly gave me a glance over before following after the Grounkle. I headed down the alley but at the first street we came to, I turned and left them. They let me. I went home alone.

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"Toothless! Let me go!" He howled. I could feel him struggling in my claws but I didn't do what he asked. I wasn't going to loose another. "Toothless! You have to let me go! Don't make me leave her! Don't you dare!" It was pitiful. I glanced over to Stormfly who was flying next to me. It was dangerous staying here, just hovering over the Viking town. Everyone else had passed us. We were alone. The Nadder looked between me and the human shape in my front claws before nodding. I

hated it. But she was right. I glanced behind us. I could see Barf fighting against the Vikings for all she was worth. It wasn't working though. I could see the huge metal cage they were forcing her towards to. At least that meant they weren't going to kill her. At least not right away.

I flew down to an empty street and set him down. Belch ripped away from me before I could even let him go all the way. With him gone, I shot into the sky and Stormfly and I flew to a safer distance. Then we turned to watch. Belch forced his way through the Vikings. I don't think the Boss himself could have kept him away from his double. He was crying. Both of them were. I couldn't see it but I knew it. Barf and Belch managed to hug before the Vikings forced both of them towards the cage, gloating over how well it had worked, using half a Zippleback as bait. They dragged them into the cage and chained it shut with them inside it. One of them raised a gun and we looked away. We couldn't stop from hearing it though. Hearing the gunshots.

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I opened my eyes. It was a nightmare. It was just a nightmare. Only instead of waking up to the real world, I woke up to a new one.

I didn't move. I didn't know where I was but I wasn't alone. There was someone else here. I could hear the scratching of their pencil as they wrote something. A sniff told me that it was a Viking. Which raised the question, why wasn't I dead? It took me a minute but then I remembered. It was that boy. He was going to kill me. But then he didn't. Where ever he took me, it was old and musty. There was enough dust that I nearly sneezed. I was lying on a few boxes fashioned into a bed. If he had bothered to haul me to this place and make up a place for me to sleep, then he wasn't going to kill me. I couldn't figure out why, but I wasn't complaining. Whatever the reason, I could find out later. For now, I needed to get him in my sights. Right now, my back was facing him and that was something I couldn't afford. Just because he didn't kill me then, doesn't mean he wasn't going to kill me now. I shifted about half a centimeter before freeze with pain. My leg was in bad shape. I don't know what happened to it but it wasn't good. The boy stopped writing but I was a bit preoccupied with my leg that felt like it was trying to kill me. I grid my teeth and roll over, my ribs screaming at me now too. Once I was on my back, I did by best to sit up. Fortunately, there was a wall behind me so I leaned against that. He stood a several feet away, watching me. The Viking was a toothpick of a boy and looked about my age. He also looked like he was ready to wet himself. Good. He should be afraid of me. If he tried anything, I was going to rip him in two, even with the busted leg.

"You're awake." He pointed out nervously. I glared at him. He fidgeted. "Um. I would have tried to help with your leg but I didn't really know what to do." He turned his gaze to the floor, rubbing the back of his neck. I didn't speak. I just stared him down. After a moment of awkward silence, he glanced back up at me. "If you needed anything, I could-" My growl cut him off. The boy took a few steps towards me. I didn't trust him. Especially not the way I was now. I knew he had a weapon on him. I wasn't going to let him anywhere near me. He took a few staggering steps back and I stopped growling. I didn't stop glaring however. I let my scales crawl their way to the surface, black dots on tan skin. I know what my eyes look like, what

I look like. I was not human. I was a dangerous creature, a monster to them, and I wanted him to remember that.

I watched him standing there, his scared fidgeting. It took him a moment but he finally seemed to understand my message. With a fleeting glance, he left the room. I listened as he left. The Viking took one flight of stairs, two flights, three. I was three flights off the ground. I couldn't help but wonder why. Wouldn't one be enough? Unless he wanted to trap me here. He knew I had a bad leg. I wouldn't be able to get far like this, especially if I had three flights of stairs to contend with. He might be a stick of a boy but he certainly wasn't stupid. I had to give him that.

I waited close to an hour before letting myself relax. He hadn't come back and I hadn't heard anything that indicate that he was near here. The boxes were close to an open window, letting me hear anything that might be down on the street. I carefully got to my feet, nearly falling as I tried to stand. The pain was horrible but I forced my way through it. Using the wall as a crutch, I limped over to the window. There was nothing but short buildings and empty streets around me. It looked a bit different but I recognized the area as the warehouse district in the town. I'd never been on a raid here, the area was abandoned long before I joined the Nest, but I'd flown through it on more than one occasion. The room he'd put me in was littered with boxes here and there, with a big gaping hole in the floor above me, right through the roof. I suspected the work of a Grounkle. They had a fun habit of dropping themselves out of the sky to get at food. It was terrifying to be on the receiving end, I knew that from personal experience. I could see the tracks in the dirt where he had pushed the boxes around and dragged me to them. It was embarrassing. The sun was setting outside. That meant I only had a few hours until I would be able to change again. Then maybe I could get out of here.

In the meantime, I shuffled back to the bed and did the best to treat my injuries. I had a partially torn ligament in my knee that hurt like hell, my ankle was broken in two different places, and, as far as I could tell, three of my ribs were bruised. There wasn't much I could do about the ribs so I did my best to fix up my leg. All that time helping the medical crew really came in handy. I didn't bother with a splint for my ankle since hopefully, I'd soon be on my way back to the Nest where I could get treated by one of our doctors. Instead, I just wrapped both it and my knee tight with strips of fabric that had been on top of the boxes. Since I had nothing soft to use, I ripped a few pieces of wood off of nearby boxes to prop it up on. Ice would have been great but that wasn't a luxury I had. I planned to stay awake until it was time, try to puzzle out just why that Viking would keep me around, but instead I ended up asleep. Whoops. When I woke up again, the moon was out and I only had two hours until my time was up. I had to hurry.

Trying to shift back into a dragon with a broken bone was the stupidest thing I had ever done. I was left howling on the floor, in pain, for what seemed like forever before I managed to focus long enough to undo what I had done. Which wasn't even much. But the second the bones had begun to change, everything went wrong. It felt like I was continuously being shot, one bullet for every heartbeat. And even once I did go back, I was still stuck on the floor, just trying to recover from it. My head was spinning and the world was getting dark, very dark. I focused on a jutting wooden board above

me, willing myself to stay conscious. If I couldn't shift, I was stuck. I was trapped in this godforsaken place with no way to get out. I was as good as dead. Whether a Viking killed me, that boy or someone else, or starvation or dehydration, I was as good as dead. I wish he'd had the guts to do it. Then I wouldn't be in this position in the first place. But right now, I didn't need to think about that. I need to get back on that 'bed' and make sure things hadn't gotten worse. Getting back up was worse than getting off and took me a few tries. I couldn't put weight on my left leg at all. I was so fucked. I did get up there though, and immediately felt for anything new. As far as I could tell, I had managed to avoid any new manage, though I sure as hell didn't help what was already there. Two of the pieces of wood I used to prop up my foot became pieces of a splint. Without them, the stack of wood was only two boards high, pitiful for what I needed it for. But it would have to work. I wasn't getting up again. Not now. I needed to sleep. Something that was avoiding me. Or rather, was warding off. The pain was horrible, a steady pulse every second or two. I was considering biting my leg off but that wouldn't help. By the time sleep finally came, I was too exhausted to think straight. I was out like a light and screw whatever tomorrow held. One step at a time, Toothless. One step at a time.

## 5. Something Stupid

To put it simply, the last two days had been insane. I shot down a Night Fury, nearly got eaten, found the Night Fury, saved the Night Fury, nearly got eaten (again), saved the Night Fury (again), and ran home before my dad figured out that something was up. And I still had no idea what I was going to do with him. He was going to be stuck in that room for a while. And I was the one who shot him down in the first place, I couldn't just leave him there. But wouldn't it be easier if I could just kill him? I mean, sure, he looked like a human sometimes but he obviously wasn't one. And it wasn't like we hadn't killed them when they looked like that either. It would just be so much simpler. I really wish I could.

Keeping a dragon secret from everyone was going to be difficult. At least he was small. It also went completely against everything we Vikings did. And what if he didn't even want my help? I mean, he was hurt but I didn't doubt he could kill me if he wanted. It kept me occupied all morning long while I was stuck at Gobber's shop. He never asked me what was wrong though, not that I noticed. I guess he just thought I was still upset about last night. Oh, if he only knew. When lunch finally crept around, I finally said something.

"I'm uh, I'm going to go home for the rest of the day. Got some homework to do." I announced when he called for lunch break.

Gobber just shrugged, like I knew he would. "Alright. I know how important that cactusleaf is."

"It's calculus. And thanks." I darted out of there as fast as I could without looking suspicious. I stopped by my house just long enough to grab some food. I wasn't really sure what dragons ate so I just grabbed some stuff I knew my dad wouldn't miss. An old lunch-able, a pack of ham, the last few slices of bread, and a tin of sardines. Hopefully one of these would appeal to him. I mean, everyone likes ham right? I snatched a bottle of water and then headed down to the warehouse district.

When I got there, the place was empty. The sheet that I'd used to make that crappy 'bed' was ripped to pieces and there was definitely more busted boxes than there was yesterday. Where'd he go? Did he leave? I walked farther into the room than just inside the door. I didn't see him anywhere. Was he hiding or something?

"Hello?" May as well try. "I have food. So you don't eat me." I said that last bit to myself. I wondered how well dragon hearing was. Something rustled from behind the next pile of boxes down from the 'bed' and a black head popped up from the other side. Looks like food works just as well on dragons as it does any human teenager. He stared at me with huge green eyes, glancing between me and the bag over my shoulder. It was a little unsettling. I ducked my head and gained a sudden interest in what was around me. I did notice that he had to literally pull himself to his feet, using the nearest boxes for support.

I watched him for a few moments, not really sure what else to do. He had wrapped up his leg with pieces of wood and strips of the sheet. That would explain a lot. I was going to have to get him some real medical supplies. I just hoped that whatever it was, it wasn't major. I couldn't exactly waltz him into the town to get him checked out by our doctor. He had a limp obviously, but he put on a brave face. As though he wasn't hurt and was walking up to a challenger, instead of a fishbone of a human. I didn't watch long. I couldn't. He was trying but I could tell how much that leg of his hurt him. And how much he hated it too. I dropped the bag on the poor excuse for a bed and went to help him. Before I could take another step though, he tensed up and growled at me. Those black scales popped up again, giving me yet another reminder of what he was. I stopped and held my hands up letting him know I wasn't going to hurt him. I wasn't sure if dragons could breathe fire in their human forms and I didn't want to find out just then.

"You have a weapon." His voice low from the growl. It wasn't a question. It was a statement. And it wasn't wrong. Vikings always armed themselves in case of a dragon attack. I was no exception. When I started to move for my pocket, he dropped into a more defensive stance and growled louder. A warning.

"It's just a knife, ok?" I started for the weapon again and this time he didn't stop me. He didn't relax though either. When I pulled it out of my pocket, he gave another growl. I didn't wait for him to do anything. I just tossed it out the nearest window. The boy gave me a weird look. As if he was trying to figure out just why I did that. There was a simple answer. I was absolutely insane. With it gone, he relaxed, a lot. Any signs of his other nature disappeared and he shifted into a casual slouch. It was different from earlier. I wasn't a threat anymore. So I guess he didn't really care. He let me approach him but when I tried to help, he snarled at me, giving me a good look at his teeth. Even if they weren't sharp or poisonous, I knew what it meant and backed off, letting him bypass me. He headed straight for the food.

While he looked through what little I had brought in the bag, I sat down on a nearby crate and watched him. He pulled out the sardines and tossed me what was left in the bag. I had kind of expected him to take it all. He had to be hungry after a day without food.

"Sardines?" I couldn't help but question. Who knew how old those things were. They'd been sitting at the back of my pantry for who knows how long.

"Nacho Lunch-ables?" He shot back in the same tone. Fair point. He sounded a lot more like what I would expect now that he wasn't growling. He practically collapsed onto his crate and tore into the little tin. I went ahead and opened up the nachos. We ate in an awkward silence. I don't think either of us knew what to make of each other.

"Toothless." He finally said with at least three sardines in his mouth.

"What?" What was toothless? I didn't get it.

He glanced up from his tin. "My name. Toothless." Oh.

"Um. I'm Hiccup." I didn't want to give out my real name. It was even worse than 'Hiccup', amazing, I know, and even if it wasn't, everyone called me Hiccup anyways.

We didn't say anything else for a while after that. Not until Toothless finished his tin of sardines. He stared at me with his big green eyes.

"What?" His stare was getting creepy.

"Got more?" Figures.

"I have stuff for ham sandwiches?" He scrunched up his nose at me.

"Ew."

"What's wrong with ham?"

"It's ham." He snatched up the remains of the sheet and bundled it up. Scooting back along the crates until he reached the wall, laid down, and stuffed the sheet under his head. He made it pretty clear that he was going to take a nap. I just sat there kind of awkwardly. I wasn't sure what to do. I knew I wasn't going home though. When I crunched loudly on a chip, his eyes flicked open long enough to give me a dry look and he rolled over so his back was towards me. I tried to finish the last few chip quietly. It wasn't long before he was asleep and even snoring a little.

Hands down, this was the strangest day I'd ever had. And yes, I was including yesterday. I never thought that I would ever have lunch with a dragon. Much less a Night Fury. It wasn't bad. Just weird. I had a feeling Toothless shared the sentiment. And it wasn't even over yet. I don't know how long I watched him, wondering what on earth I was doing, before I pulled out my sketch book and started drawing.

## 6. Vikings are Weird

"Toothless. You know you can't keep doing this." It's ration day and,



like usual, I'm given a big pile of nothing but instant ramen noodles. At least they're shrimp flavored. Stormfly is right behind me in line. After I get mine, she's handed a much bigger box. Hers is filled with all kinds of canned food, potato chips, soda, and even some fresh packs of chicken and a pair of boots. "I mean, how long has it been since you put in a request for new clothes?"

"Two months."

"Two months! In case you haven't noticed, it's not getting warmer. I don't know how you're going to managed with those short sleeves of yours when it starts snowing. You're not a Nightmare!" I readjust my hold on the box.

"I don't think which missions I go on make that big a difference." We've walked past the group of dragons around the distribution table. It's not so loud here and I can hear our footsteps while we walk. She gives me a steely look and purses her lips.

"They're going to stop serving you at the Chinese place."

"What?" Dinner out with the gang is the only thing keeping me sane on this diet of noodles.

"They told me when you left early last time. You've used up your credit."

"How? I'm on almost every scouting mission. I should still have some."

"Well, you don't. You need to start taking on more important ones. You should sign up for the next raid."

I sigh. We've had this conversation before. "I'm not going on anymore raids."

"Why not? Do you have any idea what this looks like?"

"No. And I don't care."

"Well you should! You're losing credibility with everyone. You're a strike class. A \_Night Fury, \_Toothless. Scouting missions might work for Grounkles but not you. It looks like you're getting lazy and not pulling your weight. You know what happens to dragons who don't do their job! And the Boss already has your number. Don't make things worse." I ignored her for most of her nagging. It wasn't like I hadn't heard it before. That last bit bothers me though.

"Wait. Is that why I don't have any more credit? Did he pull it?" She opens her mouth to say something but a shout stops her. Up ahead a group of Nadders have spotted us. Or more specifically, they've spotted her. I can see a few in the back pointing at us and whispering between each other. Storm just grins and waves back, nearly dropping her box.

"Just sign up for the next raid. I don't want to see you get eaten, ok?" It's her last bit of advice before she runs off to meet up with the other Nadders. I watch them for a few minutes. One of her friends pulls out the pair of boots and they immediately start squealing, probably about how cute they are. It's not long before the entire

group has turned down a different street and disappeared. Something flutters on the ground next to me. It's Stormfly's scarf. It must have fallen off when she was jumping around earlier. I shift the box so I'm holding it in one hand and pick up the blue fabric. I'll give it back to her another day. For now, I put it on and start trudging home. This time next month, it's going to be snowing and I'm really going to need a jacket.

I stretch when I wake up, forgetting about where I am and what condition I'm in. The pain fixes that quick enough. I sit up, grinding my teeth to keep from making noise. I hear the same scratching as I did last time. That meant the boy was still here. I still don't understand him. The light coming in from the windows is orange and what sky I can see through the hole in the roof is a dark dusty blue. It's sundown. I lie still and listen to his pencil for a moment. Did he stay here all day long, even though I wasn't awake? Why? Why was he doing any of this? It didn't make sense. Doing my best to stay quiet, I roll off the boxes and walk behind where he's sitting on a box of his own. He tenses when he notices me behind him but he doesn't jump like I expect him to. I guess he's figured out that I'm not going to kill him. At least not so long as he doesn't do anything iffy that is.

"What are you drawing?" It looks a little like a crossbow but I'm not sure. I also notice a little doodle in one corner. It looks like a picture of me with scales showing.

"Uh, nothing." Hiccup sticks his pencil in the book and closes it before I can figure out what the crossbow thing was supposed to be. I don't say anything about the other drawing on the page. "I got some stuff while you were asleep." He pulls up the same bag that he had before but this time it has a lot more stuff in it. He hands it to me to inspect. I dump it all out on the box behind him. I didn't want to go digging through it. I start going through it while he just lists the stuff off, watching me. "I brought a sleeping bag and one of our first aid kits. It's military grade so there's probably something in there. My dad has, like, twelve so use whatever you need. There's also a box of Advil, and some paper towels." I stop sniffing at what he brought and lock onto two plastic containers. I know what they are before he even says it. "And I got you some sushi since you seem to like fish." I have three pieces in my mouth before he stops talking. The sardines from earlier helped but I'm still starving. Half the roll is gone before I stop long enough to grab a bottle of water that he also must have brought. The whole time I'm stuffing my face, he just stares at me with this amused look on his face.

"What?" It comes out muffled. I just stuffed a few more pieces in. "You've never seen a hungry person?"

"You eat like a Viking."

"You would too if you hadn't eaten anything for two days." I eat the last piece of the roll and move onto the next container.

"Fair enough." The second one lasts longer. After a few bites I hold it out for him to take some. "Uh, no thanks. I don't really like sushi." I just stare at him, still waiting for him to take a piece. I'm not going to eat all this without him eating some too. Eventually my stare breaks him and he takes a piece. I still watch him until he's actually eaten it. Rude ass Vikings. It's amazing they can even

function in society.

When the sushi is gone, I take the first aid kit and sleeping bag back to my line of boxes. As it turns out, standing up long enough to lay out the sleeping bag is too much for me. When he sees me having trouble, Hiccup offers to help. I hate that I can't do it myself but I let him. It only takes him a few seconds to put it up. I just went ahead and moved back to the box where I had dumped the stuff out. I unwrap my leg and roll up my pants. If I'm not going to be leaving this place soon, I may as well fix myself up the best I can. I ignore Hiccup while I do it. He's just standing there, fidgeting awkwardly. Apparently the boy didn't have very good social skills. Either that or I still freak him out. I'm ok with the second one.

My foot is about as bad as I expect it to be. Wrapping it up last night was definitely the right choice. It's still swollen and bruised but not as much as it might have been if I hadn't wrapped it. My knee is another matter. Wrapping it didn't help as much. It's still hard to move and the inside of my leg has turned an ugly purple color. Seeing it makes Hiccup even more uncomfortable. I really wish he would stop. If he's going to act like this, he can go home.

"I'm sorry." He finally says after I've fixed up my ankle. I glance up at him.

"For what?"

"For what? For that." He gestures at my leg. I just shrug and start wrapping my knee.

"Don't worry about it." He stares at me for several moments, thoroughly confused. I don't bother to say anything.

"So you're just fine with it?" He sounds exasperated. He's obviously not getting it. "I shot you out of the sky and almost kill you and you're \_fine with it\_?"

"Yup." I cut the gauze from the rest of the roll and look at him again. "Do you want me to be upset about it?" He holds up a finger like he's about to tell me that yes, I should be upset before rethinking it. He looks away and just wags his finger at me in silence. "I do have a question though." I carefully rearrange myself so my foot is on the ground again. "Do you have a Gameboy?"

I get the feeling he was expecting something else. "A Gameboy? No." Well shit. "I have an old DS I don't use though. I can bring it tomorrow after school if you want?"

"Awesome. Bring some more sushi too." He blinks at me but doesn't say no. We stare at each other in the dimming light before it finally dawns on him that the light is dimming. Outside, the sun has nearly disappeared beneath the horizon. Muttering some rather interesting vocabulary, Hiccup gathers up his bag and heads towards the exit.

"I'll be back tomorrow!" He calls. I just wave at him, rather amused. Vikings are so weird.

The first snow smothered the Nest, turning the dark buildings white. So naturally, the entire Nest was caught up in one huge snowball

fight. I couldn't leave the house without getting pelted with snowballs. Eventually I climbed up a fire escape to try to get away from it all. My coat was absolutely soaked otherwise I could join in on the battle field. The empty lots next to the building had been turned into a war zone. Zipplebacks to the south, Nadders to the east, and Grounkles in the west. The Nightmares were a few lots away playing their own game. Nobody wants to try and have a snowball fight with dragons that melt the snow around them. The Nadders had made a low wall with groves like a castle's and were in full offense mode, hitting anything that came into their line of vision. The Grounkles meanwhile were pulling a heavy defense with a thick snow fort. Every so often they would catapult huge balls of snow at one of the other camps. The Zipplebacks were balancing between defense and offense. They'd put up a rather tall wall and would organize massive attacks when every single one of them threw snowballs at a camp, aiming be damned. No one knew who was winning. No one cared. I sat and watched from my perch.

Stormfly nailed Belch in the face, actually managing to knock him back. Barf's face popped up in the hole in the wall where his brother's used to be. "Hey!" A snowball smacked him almost as soon as he said it. He went down after his brother. Stormfly was cracking up from her side.

"You're going to regret that!" They both nearly got hit again when they yelled at her. The next time they reappeared, they each had a huge armful of snowballs. Not a single one hit her. The Nadder girl dodged them, teasing them the entire time. When the twins ran out of snowballs, they started breaking off pieces of the wall to throw at her. The closest Zipplebacks tried to pull them down while the Nadders just cheered them on. They finally managed to get her when she leaned down to grab snowballs of her own. Not one, but two chunks of snow sent her toppling backwards. The entire field gave a collective 'ooh'. The twins only got to celebrate their victory for a few moments before Storm stood back up. I'd never seen them work so fast trying to get that wall fixed. With an angry Stormfly as their leader, the snow war was taken to a whole new level. I just laughed at them while I watched. It'd be nice to have a team to play on.

Something made the fire escape shake. When I looked down, it was Meatlug hauling herself up. I wasn't really worried about her trying to get me. Any of the others would but not Meatlug. She was a lot more relaxed than the others and still gave off a serious big sister vibe. When she reached me, I scooted over to make room and she flopped down beside me. Her face was bright red from the cold and based on her lopsided pigtails, someone must have just hit her in the back of the head.

"Are you enjoying your first snow day here?" She asked, giving me one of her sweet little smiles. I just shook my head and grinned.

"They're all insane." Barf and Belch were on snow duty now and having to run out into the line of fire to gather up snow from in front of their wall. They would run out, gather up as much as they could as fast as they could, and run back to safety, screaming the entire time and being followed by a line of Nadder snowballs. Beside me, Meatlug laughed.

For a while, we just sat in silence, me watching the battle and Meatlug fixing her hair. The Grounkles were launching their massive snowballs again when she spoke up. "You know it's fine that you waited before going on raids." I should have known it was something. I'd been there for a while now and what I was doing was still the talk of the Nest. I didn't answer her. "I started late too so there's nothing wrong with it." She continued. I know she was trying to help but she was really just getting on my nerves. "I was afraid too." I stood up suddenly and grabbed the ladder to the next landing. Meatlug gave me a pitifully apologetic look, like she had offended me. She had but I wasn't going to let her know that.

"Come on." I grunt and head up the ladder. I don't stop until I reach the roof of the building, Meatlug right behind me every step of the way. I head over to the ledge. I can hear her footsteps in the snow behind me but I don't turn around. Without gloves, making a snowball makes my fingers hurt with the cold. Meatlug's getting wary behind me and leans down to make her own weapon. After making three snowballs, I turn and give her a smirk before launching the first one down at the field. The first hits a Nadder boy in the side, making him stumble to the side. The next hits the girl next to Stormfly who actually falls into her. And the last one, I aim at a Zippleback pair. It hits one in the head and makes him fall, dragging his other down with him. Meatlug is practically in hysterics laughing. I flash her a smile before starting to make more snowballs. She takes it as a cue to unload her own arsenal.

For several minutes, the field is in chaos trying to figure out where the snowballs are coming from. Together, we're hitting all three camps. I take up the Grounkle camp since Meatlug can't throw that far. Both Stormfly and Barf figure it out at the same time, sharing a look from across the field. Belch is just a second behind. I can see them yell 'Toothless' and they start to scan the skyline for me. When they do find us, we give them sarcastic smiles before firing. I manage to get Stormfly and Belch. Meatlug, meanwhile, managed to nail Barf in a rather sensitive spot. I'm sure it was accidental but that doesn't make it any less funny. While we're busy trying not to fall off the building from laughing so hard, the others start coming up with a way to get us back. Snowballs slowly start inching up the side of the building until one finally hits Meatlug in the gut. She just laughs like she's been tickled and flings a huge snowball at the dragon who hit her. But now that they can get to us, things start to shift back to the way it was. Every species for themselves. The battle wages on until evening when everyone was too tired to keep going and most of the snow was beyond usable. Meatlug practically falls on me on the way down, she's so tired. I love snow days at the Nest.

End  
file.